

Washington State Patrol Media Release

Chief Ronal W. Serpas



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November 24, 2003
For Immediate Release
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Auto Theft Increase Slows in 2002

Washington State Patrol Chief Ronal W. Serpas announced the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has released their annual Uniform Crime Statistic (UCR) data for 2002. The 2002 data indicated the per capita occurrence of motor vehicle theft in Washington State rose 2% to 667 stolen vehicle thefts per 100,000 population. The 2001 motor vehicle theft rate was 652.

Washington State now ranks as the 4th highest state in motor vehicle theft behind Arizona, Nevada, and Hawaii. This is down one place from the state's #3 ranking in 2001.

Washington's 2002 auto theft rate was 54% higher than the national average of 432.1 auto thefts per 100,000 population. In 2002, a total of 40,493 vehicles were stolen in Washington State.

Seattle led the state in the most stolen vehicles with 8,308, followed by Tacoma (3,240), Spokane (1,685), Everett (1,675), and Federal Way (1,206). The vehicles stolen from these five cities represent nearly 40% of the 2002 Washington State total.

Although rising, the Washington State per capita auto theft rate increase is slowing. Serpas reported that Washington State experienced a 17% increase between 1995 and 2001, with a 9% increase between 2000 and 2001. "With the lower rate of increase reported in 2002, we are encouraged that our efforts are starting to pay off," stated Serpas.

The Washington State Patrol has three auto theft investigative teams dedicated to reducing auto theft in Washington State. These teams are assigned statewide and work in partnership with city, county, and federal agencies. From January through October 2003, State Patrol auto theft detectives have arrested 108 auto thieves and recovered 361 vehicles with a value of over \$3 million. Serpas reported WSP auto theft detectives have increased arrests 468% and stolen vehicle recoveries 76% 2003 year to date compared to 2002.

The FBI reported the average value of a stolen vehicle in 2002 was \$6,701. According to the FBI, 40,493 vehicles were stolen in Washington in 2002, resulting in an economic loss of over \$245 million.

"Auto theft is not only costly, but also increases the danger to the motoring public. 16% of WSP pursuits through August have involved stolen vehicles. Law enforcement and the public need to make the reduction of this crime a priority," stated Serpas.

The State Patrol recommends the public utilize anti-theft measures to help law enforcement combat this crime. "There are several technologies available that are effective in helping vehicle owners keep their cars from being stolen. We encourage the public to use those technologies combined with parking in well lit areas with the keys removed and the doors locked to reduce the chance of your car being stolen," said Serpas.

Additional information on auto theft in Washington State is available on the Washington State Patrol Web site at <http://www.wsp.wa.gov/> or the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chief's Web site at <http://www.waspc.org/>.

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